



Questions from the Dental Program Meeting
August 29, 2008
City of San José City Hall

1. Will the installation of an amalgam separator replace the chair side traps and/or filters that are currently part of my vacuum system?

Not necessarily. Not all of the scrap amalgam and particulates are captured by the chair-side traps and vacuum filters. Grinding, drilling, and polishing of amalgam fillings may result in the production of fine particulate matter that passes through the chair-side traps and vacuum filters. The traps and filters do capture large amalgam particles. If you remove the traps and filters, these particles will be captured by the separator; however cleaning and maintenance of the traps and filters would probably be more cost effective than having this additional material captured by the separator.

2. Has the City connected with the suppliers and dental equipment distributors or local service technicians that service the equipment about the proposed program?

In the spring of 2009 we are planning to present workshops on the proposed program with vendor fairs where you will have the opportunity to talk with amalgam separator suppliers and distributors and see samples. We will begin contacting local suppliers and soliciting their interest in participating in the Spring workshop.

3. What kind of separators will satisfy the Dental Amalgam Program requirement?

Only certified ISO11143 separators will meet the requirement of the program. While we cannot recommend one separator above another, a list of approved separators can be found at:

http://sfwater.org/detail.cfm/MC_ID/14/MSC_ID/118/MTO_ID/228/C_ID/3603>ListID/3

4. How much mercury is in fluorescents bulbs and does that compare to the amount we think is in amalgam?

Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing – an average of 4 milligrams – about the amount that would cover the tip of a ball point pen. (Energy Star®) No mercury is released when the bulbs are intact (not broken) or in use. CFLs are banned from disposal in landfills in California and must be disposed of as Household Hazardous Waste. For a list of where you can drop off your old CFLs, go to: <http://www.hhw.org>

Dental amalgam is a mix of approximately 43% to 54% mercury with other metals, including silver, copper and tin. (ADA) For example, if the average filling is 1 gram, the amount of mercury contained in the average filling is .5 gram.

5. How did you determine that 61% of the mercury found in the influent to the treatment plant is coming from dentists? Was it free or total mercury? Can we get a copy of the Sector Loading Study?

From late 2006 into early 2007, samples were collected as part of a sector loading study from residential, commercial, dental, and industrial dischargers for mercury. Samples were tested for total mercury. Results from the total sector loading samples from all sources indicate .44 pounds per day of mercury enter the Plant. Dental offices were identified as the source of .27 pounds, or 61% of the total. See attached report for additional information regarding the Sector Loading Study.

6. I have an amalgam separator already installed but I don't have the maintenance schedule from the manufacturer. What should I do?

We suggest that you follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule for your separator. If you don't have a manual for your separator, we suggest you contact the manufacturer. Keep in mind that older separators may not meet ISO 11143 standards. To view a list of authorized separators go to:

http://sfwater.org/detail.cfm/MC_ID/14/MSC_ID/118/MTO_ID/228/C_ID/3603>ListID/3

7. How effective have other dental programs been in the Bay Area?

Several Wastewater Treatment Plants in the Bay Area have implemented dental amalgam reduction programs similar to the program San Jose is proposing. All have seen a reduction in mercury entering their treatment plants. However, the largest reduction has been in the amalgam particulates in the sludge – the solids resulting from the treatment of wastewater. Currently, sludge from the San Jose plant is used as daily cover at a landfill. More beneficial use of the sludge in the future is currently being studied, including energy extraction, and reduction of amalgam particulate could become an important factor.